

The Vermont School Readiness Series

Children With Special Needs

Helping Children with Special Needs Succeed

While all children and their families need help getting ready to start school,

children with significant health or developmental challenges require specialized assistance in making this important transition. With the right support, most children with disabilities can be just as successful as others.

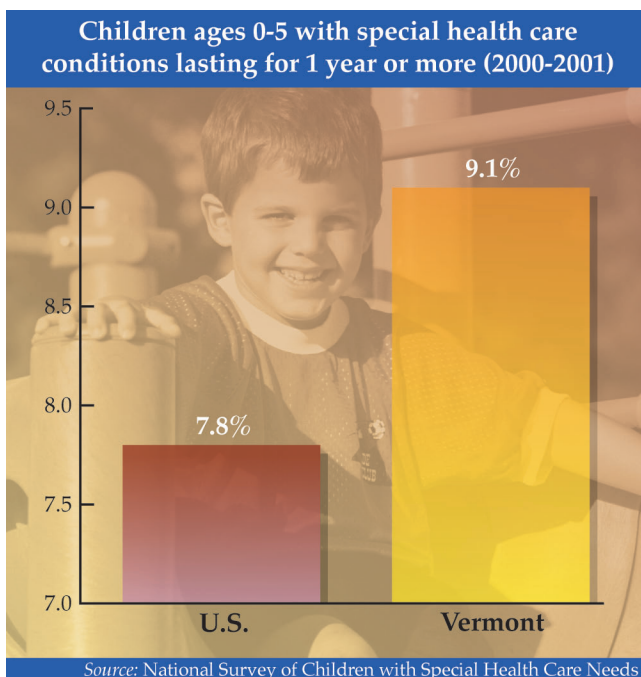
Support for these families needs to be carefully planned, with parents involved in the ongoing decision-making. Parents may have worries about whether their child will be treated with respect by school staff and other children, and whether appropriate accommodations to the child's disability will be made. School personnel may be concerned about having the knowledge and other resources required to meet the child's needs. There may be challenges in coordinating multiple services that are part of the child's care-plan. Starting school "on the right foot" can make a big difference in future school success.



Who Are Vermont's Children With Special Needs?

We don't have a way of taking a comprehensive count of all children in this group, but we can estimate their numbers several different ways. Recently published data estimates the number of Vermont children ages 0-5 in 2000-01 who had special health care conditions lasting for a year or more at 9.1 percent, compared to the national average of 7.8 percent. That represents around 3,600 children in Vermont. Disabilities are more common among families living in poverty.

Some of the more common disabilities (which can be present at birth or acquired later) include vision, speech, and hearing problems; problems in physical/motor areas; social-emotional problems including autism-spectrum disorders; and chronic/episodic conditions such as asthma. While we lack definitive data, anecdotal evidence tells us that the numbers of



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children with certain disabilities—for example, asthma and autism-spectrum disorders—are increasing. Not all of these children are identified, though that is the first step toward the family’s getting help.

In Vermont, the Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN) program, within the Department of Health, provides clinic services, specialized equipment, limited financial assistance, and other services to children with certain health-related conditions and their families, through age 21.

More than 1,000 Vermont infants and toddlers (up to age 3) are served each year by the Family, Infant, and Toddler Program (FITP). These children have delayed development or a health condition that could lead to delays. “Delayed development” means a deficit in one or more functional areas that puts a child significantly behind the norm for young children. Through 12 community-based agencies, FITP provides individualized

services, usually in the child’s home, but also in childcare programs.

Each year, about 300 children “age-out” of FITP; most then are eligible for Essential Early Education (EEE). EEE (“triple E”) can be thought of as Vermont’s preschool (ages 3-5) special education program. The approximately 1,000 children in this program have a variety of disabilities. As in FITP, services are provided at home, in school, in a childcare setting, or wherever meets the needs of the child and his or her family.

Teachers tell us that about nine percent of kindergarten students are receiving special education or other educational accommodations for disabilities.

Incidentally, it is the legal responsibility of the “Local Education Agency” to find all children in the community, from birth to age five, who have disabilities.



What Can You Do?

- Encourage parents to bring their infant, toddler, or preschooler to developmental screenings offered in every community.
- Make sure young children get regular, well-child care, including recommended immunizations, from their pediatrician or family doctor.
- Join or support one or more organizations that assist, and are advocates for, families with a child with special health care needs (see “For More Information”).

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- Join efforts in your community to reduce pregnant women and children’s exposure to environmental agents that can cause disability (e.g., lead paint, pesticides, and other indoor and outdoor pollutants).
- Support organizations and community events that celebrate the strengths of people with disabilities (e.g., Special Olympics).

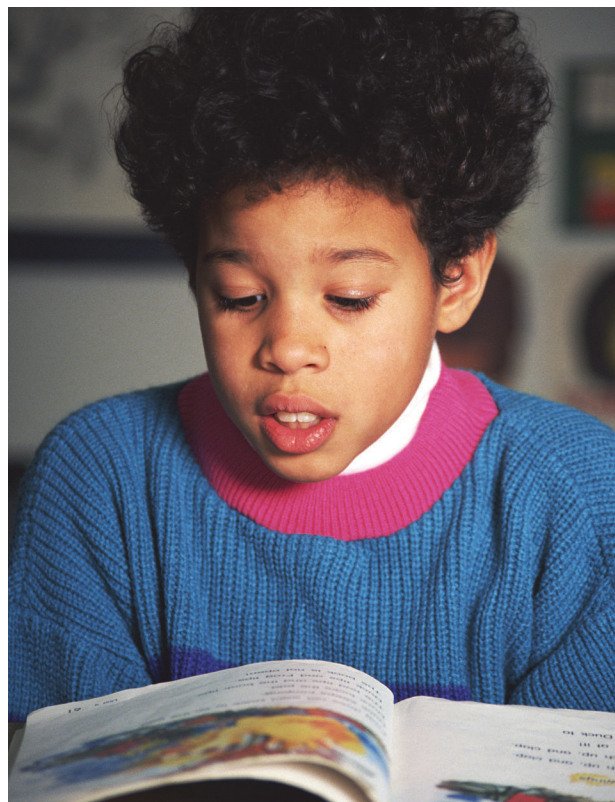
For More Information:

Children with Special Health Needs program
1-800-660-4427

Family, Infant, and Toddler Project
(802) 651-1786
www.state.vt.us/srs/childcare

Early Essential Education
(802) 828-3130

Parent-to-Parent of Vermont
provides a network of support and information for families whose child has a chronic illness or disability or has been born prematurely.
1-800-800-4005
www.partoparvt.org



1 Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health. National Survey of Children With Special Health Care Needs. Accessed at <http://cshcndata.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?topic=stateprevalence&geo=Vermont>

School Readiness Series:

What Do We Know?

Children's readiness for kindergarten
Schools' readiness for children

Are Our Young Children Healthy?

Children who are overweight or at risk
Health factors affecting learning

Families With Special Challenges

Children living in poverty
Domestic violence and substance abuse
Incarceration of parents
Refugees

Social-Emotional Development

Behavioral/emotional development
Interaction with other students
Challenges for teachers

Children With Special Needs

Who are children with special needs?
Support information

The Workforce in Early Care & Education

Caring for caregivers
Paid caregivers
Investing in quality childcare

The School Readiness Series is one of several research initiatives currently supported by the Vermont Research Partnership. Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. States are developing comprehensive school readiness indicator systems, a necessity to sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments to improve outcomes for young children and their families. Vermont's School Readiness Series strives to communicate that "readiness" is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities. The Series provides fundamental school readiness indicators and resources for additional information about what can be done to help young Vermonters make the most of school.

The Vermont Research Partnership was established in 1998 as a collaborative between the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, and the University of Vermont. The Partnership's primary objective is to study and improve the effectiveness of community-based initiatives undertaken by these three parties. The Vermont Research Partnership develops shared research agendas on topics of particular importance for enhancing policies and practices that affect children, youth, and families. Projects engage the diverse perspectives of researchers, program directors, practitioners, and community members from across the state.



Vermont Research Partnership
CESS, University of Vermont
451 Waterman • 85 So. Prospect St.
Burlington, Vermont 05405
T: (802) 656-8559 • F: (802) 656-2702